

1. Defining Evangelism and Witnessing (2Q 2012—Evangelism and Witnessing)

Biblical material: Acts 4:33, 13:48, 1 John 1:3, Acts 13:1-49, 22:2-21, 1 Pet. 3:15, Matthew 28:19, 20.

Quotes

- Evangelism is truth demanding a verdict. *Lionel Fletcher*
- Evangelism's highest and ultimate end is not the welfare of men, not even their eternal bliss, but the glorification of God. *R.B. Kuiper*
- What is the first hypothesis for evangelism? That God is there, and is the kind of God the Bible says he is, and that he has not been silent but has given us propositional truth. *Francis Schaeffer*
- The Word of God is not just for domestic consumption; it is also for export. *William Freel*
- The evangel is not denunciatory of sin. It is not pronounciatory of judgment. It is annunciatory of salvation. *G. Campbell Morgan*

Questions

How do we define evangelism and witnessing within the context of the Great Controversy? What perspective does such a view bring? What is to be the central focus of our message? How do we best “evangelize”? What is our wider mission before the whole universe? How do we answer the charges against God?

Bible summary

The central message preached by the early Christians was the resurrection (Acts 4:33). The sharing of God's good news of salvation resulted in many believing (Acts 13:48). The disciples' message was a simple one: they simply told what they had seen and heard (1 John 1:3). Paul and Barnabas set off on their missionary journey as recorded in Acts 13:1-49. Again this was not some complicated strategy. They just went from place to place telling all who would listen about what they had discovered about God and his salvation. Paul tells the story of his own conversion in Acts 22:2-21, not hiding any of the facts but presenting the transforming power of God to change and to heal. 1 Pet. 3:15 tells us we should always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope we have—a great definition of witnessing. In the gospel commission of Matthew 28:19-20 we are given the task of sharing the wonderful truth about God to all nations.

Comment

Evangelism is a word that provokes many responses. Sometimes it has become programmatic, occasionally deceptive, frequently abused. But at its heart it is simply telling the truth you have discovered about God, and his salvation. Sadly our evangelism has often ended up speaking more about us...

The focus must always be on God. “We do not preach ourselves,” (2 Cor. 4:5), for the message is all about God and his gracious character revealed before the on-looking universe. The failure to remember this has led to many problems. For example, what is proselytism and what is evangelism? Evangelism is generally used in a positive sense by

those who believe in sharing their faith. On the other hand proselytism is the term used to condemn evangelism you don't like!

In fact the hot topic of conversation on the world religious scene is proselytism, usually defined as religious people using unfair means to try and convert others. Representatives of the Vatican and the World Council of Churches have sat down with leaders from Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and indigenous religious traditions to engage in a three-year process that is meant to end in an agreed code of conduct for conversions. Some countries have banned proselytism. People are not allowed to change their religion, while those who try to convert others face jail.

So who gets to decide what is proselytism and what is evangelism? What could be considered undue pressure, or unfair inducement, or even bribery? One Ambassador whose government is looking at banning "unethical conversions" once commented to me that even the offers of education or better health could be seen as inducements. The protest that this is simply what Christians do in following the example of Christ made no difference—in their eyes this was unacceptable proselytism and should be criminalized.

So what are we to do? If others decide to label evangelism as unacceptable proselytism, is it enough to cry and protest? Or should it make us think—not just about our own methodologies, but on how our actions are viewed, even if they are frequently mistaken. It's true that at times some will deliberately misunderstand. But in such situations, should we not sit down with those of different faith communities and seek better understanding? No, we are not about to give up evangelism. We are called to share the good news of God with all people everywhere. But if we can avoid needless offence and explain our best of intentions in an open way, should we not take every opportunity to do so?

How should the principles of Jesus inform our understanding of evangelism and witnessing? That surely should be our highest goal—to understand the way Jesus shared the truth of God, and to follow his lead. This will be the primary goal of this quarter's studies here.

Ellen White Comments

But a faithful performance of duty goes hand in hand with a right estimate of the character of God. There is earnest work to do for the Master. Christ came to preach the gospel to the poor, and He sent His disciples forth to do the same work He came to do. So He sends forth His workers today. {HP 131}

Christ came to represent the Father. We behold in him the image of the invisible God. He clothed his divinity with humanity, and came to the world that the erroneous ideas Satan had been the means of creating in the minds of men, in regard to the character of God, might be removed. {ST, January 20, 1890}

Pardoning, redeeming love is brought to view in Christ Jesus. Satan had misrepresented the character of God, and it was necessary that a correct representation should be made to worlds unfallen, to angels, and to men. {RH, March 9, 1897}

Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and results of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. {ST, February 13, 1893 par. 12}

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